

Message Text

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12

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2471

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TAGS: ECON, BTRA, SY

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT ASAD'S REMARKS ON ECONOMY TO AMERICAN BUSINESS-
MEN

1. DURING 135-MINUTE MEETING OF TIME, INC. "NEWSTOUR" GROUP
OF TOP-FLIGHT AMERICAN BUSINESS EXECUTIVES WITH SYRIAN
PRESIDENT ASAD EVENING JAN. 21, PRESIDENT MADE FOLLOWING
REMARKS RELATING TO SYRIAN ECONOMY AND COMMERCE:

2. ASAD WARMLY WELCOMED GROUP OF AMERICAN BUSINESSMEN TO
SYRIA, REGRETTED THEIR VISIT WAS SHORT, AND STRESSED NEED FOR
MORE CONTACTS AS LACK OF SUCH CONTACT HAD LED TO MISUNDER-
STANDINGS IN PAST WHICH NOT IN INTERESTS OF ARABS OR U.S.
AT END OF HIS INITIAL PRESENTATION, ASAD NOTED THAT HAD THERE
BEEN PEACE, DISCUSSION COULD HAVE BEEN MORE ABOUT BUSINESS AND
COMMERCE, RATHER THAN PREDOMINATELY ON POLITICS. HE EMPHASIZED
SYRIA VERY MUCH WANTED TO DEVELOP ITS RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. AND
IT WAS CLEAR THERE ALREADY HAD BEEN IMPROVEMENT IN THIS AREA.

3. WHEN ASKED IF SYRIA IS A SOCIALIST COUNTRY, ASAD REPLIED
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HIS NATION IS NON-ALIGNED, LESS-DEVELOPED AND MEMBER OF THE

THIRD WORLD. SYRIA HOPED IT COULD SAVE FUNDS SPENT FOR WAR IN ORDER TO SPEND MORE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. SYRIA'S SOCIALISM IS NOT COMMUNISM AND "WE ARE NOT COMMUNISTS. WE ARE NATIONALIST-SOCIALIST." PRESIDENT DESCRIBED PUBLIC, PRIVATE AND JOINTS SECTORS OF SYRIAN ECONOMY, NOTING EXAMPLE OF PUBLIC SECTOR IN NATURAL RESOURCES, PARTICULARLY OIL AND PHOSPHATE.

4. ASAD CONCLUDED HIS REMARKS BY REPEATING HIS WELCOME TO THIS GROUP OF AMERICAN BUSINESSMEN, ADDING THEIR COMPANIES WERE WELCOME TO WORK IN SYRIA.

5. COMMENT. FROM SUBSEQUENT COMMENTS OF GROUP, MANY WERE IMPRESSED WITH ASAD'S PRESENTATION. WHILE MOST OF HIS COMMENTS PERTAINED TO POLITICAL ARENA, HIS FINAL REMARKS, MADE ENTIRELY AT HIS INITIATIVE, WERE FIRMLY DIRECTED TOWARD ENCOURAGING AMERICAN BUSINESS INTEREST IN SYRIA.
MURPHY

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